

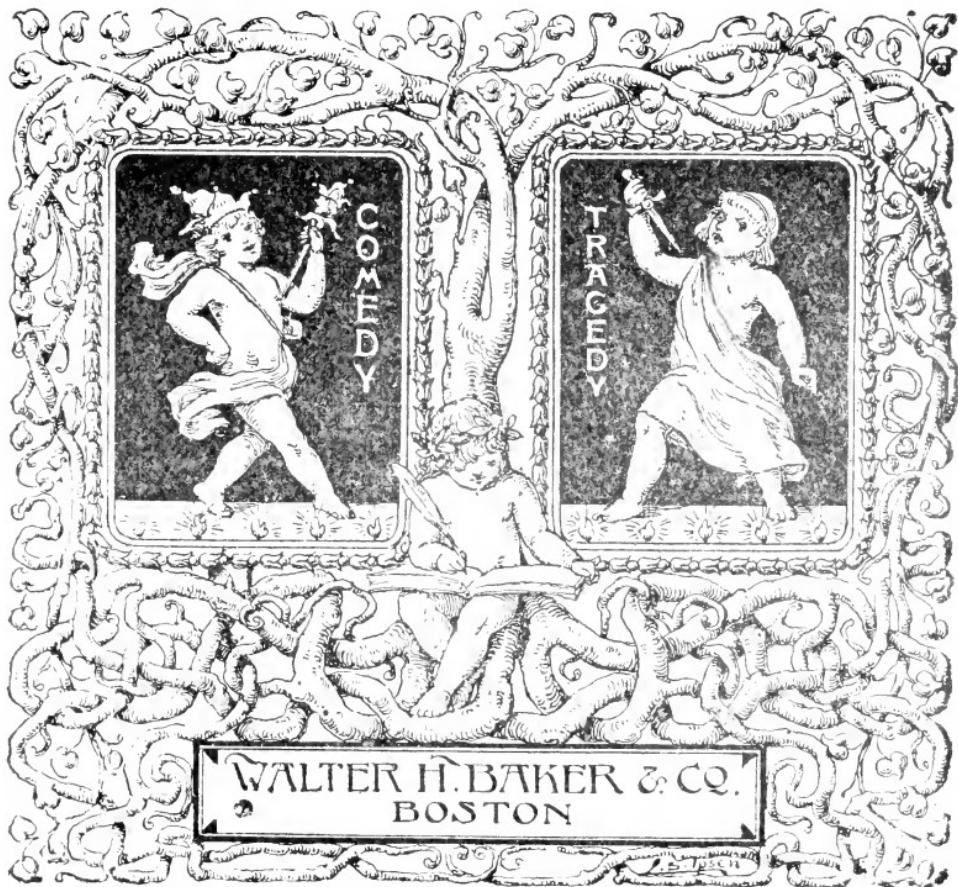
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BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1914

Her First Assignment

CHARACTERS

MRS. ALICE GORDON-STERLING, *a very young matron.*
WILBERTA GORDON, "Billy," *her sister.*
MRS. CRAIG-WINTER.
MRS. HARRISON FOLINSBEE.
MRS. ROSEMARY STEVENS.
FRANCES KIDDER.
JACINTH CARLYSLE.
MADGE HASTINGS.
MARY STODDARD.
JESSIE, *Mrs. Sterling's maid.*

Plays about an hour.



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Her First Assignment

SCENE.—MRS. STERLING's drawing-room. Exits R. and C.

(As the curtain rises MRS. ALICE GORDON STERLING, in an elaborate afternoon gown, stands by a table arranging flowers in bowls. She should be represented as being about eighteen years old, her sister about seventeen. MRS. FOLINSBEE is a distinguished-looking woman of forty. MRS. STEVENS slightly older than the other guests. All but JESSIE wear afternoon gowns, and all but MRS. STERLING wear hats.)

Enter JESSIE, with a large glass bowl.

JESSIE. Is this the bowl you meant, Mrs. Sterling?

ALICE. Yes, that is the one. See if it will hold these red flowers. (JESSIE takes the flowers and arranges them in the bowl.) My sister hasn't come in yet?

JESSIE. No, miss—ma'am, I mean.

ALICE (looking anxious). I do hope she won't be late. You are sure everything is ready?

JESSIE (with a superior smile). Yes, miss. Excuse me, ma'am, I mean. If you could have seen the affairs I served at when I worked for Mrs. Craig-Winter, you wouldn't have any doubts about me having things ready.

ALICE (looking annoyed). I dare say.

(A door is heard to close. She turns her head toward the C. exit and listens.)

JESSIE. Why, Mrs. Craig-Winter—

ALICE (impatiently). My sister, I think.

(Walks toward door.)

WILBERTA GORDON (outside). Al-ice! Where in the world are you?

ALICE. Here, Billy.

Enter WIL., C. *She is a girl about seventeen, very pretty. She wears a tailor-made suit and hat.*

WIL. Oh, Alice, I have had a streak of luck ! (*Sees JESSIE. Stops abruptly.*) Last touches for the festive occasion ?

ALICE. Yes. How does everything look ?

WIL. Lovely, dear.

ALICE. Well, I owe much of it to Jessie.

JESSIE. Thanks, miss—ma'am, I mean. I hope I worked long enough for Mrs. Craig-Winter to be able to get ready for an occasion like this. Can I do anything more for you ?

ALICE. No. You may go. [Exit JESSIE, R.

WIL. (*removing her hat and coat; throwing them on to a chair.*) My soul, Alice, how do you stand her ? It is a good thing she doesn't work for me ! I would tell her a few things that "Mrs. Craig-Winter" (*imitating JESSIE*) never even heard about.

ALICE. Hush ! For pity's sake ! She is the limit and I've had "Mrs. Craig-Winter" for breakfast, dinner and supper ever since she came, but the girl really is a treasure. I never could have managed without her. I'm scared to death for fear she will leave.

WIL. And well she knows it. She will run the house and every one in it shortly.

ALICE. I don't know which is the most annoying, the incomparable Mrs. Craig-Winter, or her insistence in calling me "miss" instead of "madam."

WIL. I don't know that I blame her there. You look about sixteen, sister mine. That dress makes you look even more youthful than you usually do.

ALICE. Billy, you don't honestly mean that ? (*Runs to a glass.*) I've done everything I could think of to make myself look older, for Jessie is no worse than some of the "cats" who are coming here this afternoon. They all say that I am a matron when I ought to be a "bud." They never will forgive me because I married before I had a chance to make my debut.

WIL. (*disgusted*). Oh, piffle ! What would they say if they knew you couldn't have made a debut ? That you would have been clicking a typewriter in some office if you hadn't become Mrs. Sterling ?

ALICE. Heaven! It's a good thing for Richard that I came out of the West and no one here knows our early financial history.

WIL. Honestly, Alice, aren't you horribly sick of the whole business?

ALICE (*sighing*). Well, I will tell you the truth, Billy. I love Richard just as much as ever, more if anything, but it's terribly hard to live up to his money.

WIL. (*dryly*). I thought so.

ALICE. We always lived such a different life, and I must say, Billy, I think the things I used to do counted for a good deal more than the things I am doing now, but I wouldn't let Dick know for the world. I'll be a credit to him or die in the attempt. But, Billy, I'm horribly selfish. You said you had struck luck. What is it, dear?

WIL. Oh, Alice, at last I have an assignment!

ALICE. That horrible newspaper!

WIL. Now, Alice, why do you say that "horrible newspaper"? You know I am hoping to get my living out of a horrible newspaper, and I've been weeks convincing an editor that I am equal to an assignment. I wouldn't get it now if it wasn't for sickness, but I've got the chance, and believe me, I am going to make good.

ALICE. Billy, you know that neither Dick nor I want you to work on a newspaper, or anything else as far as that's concerned.

WIL. I appreciate that, Alice, but Dick married one poor girl, and it isn't likely that I'm going to make him feel that he has married two. It was more than good of him to offer me a home here with you. I'm not going to let him support me into the bargain.

ALICE. But, Billy dear, you are so young.

WIL. (*with a shout*). Young? Well, now it doesn't seem to me that you are the one to deliver a lecture on the proper course to be pursued by maidens of tender years. If you are old enough to marry, I am old enough to work.

ALICE. What—what is the assignment?

WIL. I'm going to a Mrs. Ferncroft's to be present at an afternoon affair of some kind.

ALICE. This afternoon?

WIL. Yes. There is to be some popular writer at Mrs. Ferncroft's, and do you know, I have forgotten her name. I was so excited when they told me that I didn't notice, but it

won't make any difference. I can find out who she is when I get there.

ALICE. Oh, Billy, I wanted you here this afternoon to help me.

WIL. My goodness, Alice, you don't need my help for just an "At Home." Besides it will be all the better for you not to have to introduce your reporter sister. You might lose class.

ALICE. Now that will do, Billy Gordon! When my friends can't receive my sister, they can't receive me.

WIL. You are the dearest girl in the world, Alice. I've got to ask a favor of you. Will you lend me a gown for this afternoon?

ALICE. A gown?

WIL. Yes. I have to appear at Mrs. Ferncroft's as a guest. She doesn't want any one to know that I am a reporter. I need something, I suppose (*doubtfully*), after the style of the one you have on.

ALICE. Yes, and a picture hat. You can have anything you like, dear. I was going to offer you something of mine for my own affair. Come, and we will see what we can find for you.

(WIL. takes up her hat and coat and they exeunt R. Telephone is heard to ring. Rings again. JESSIE enters R., crosses stage. Exits C.)

JESSIE (outside). Hello! Yes'm. Just a minute, please. I'll speak to her.

Enters C. with the telephone in her hand, the cord trailing through the doorway. ALICE enters R.

ALICE. Did I hear the telephone, Jessie?

JESSIE. Yes, miss—ma'am.

ALICE (calling back from R. doorway). Take anything you want, Billy. (Takes the telephone from JESSIE and sits down. She doesn't notice that JESSIE stands by C. exit listening.) Hello! Yes, this is Mrs. Sterling. Oh, Mrs. Folinsbee, how do you do? Oh, can't you? I'm so sorry. I can't tell you how sorry. Oh, no, of course you can't help it, but it's a terrible disappointment to us all. Where? (Pause.) Yes, it is too bad. You are leaving to-night? Then I shall not see you at all? I'm so sorry! Yes, thank you. Good-bye! (JESSIE exits quickly as ALICE rises.) Oh-o-o-o!

(Walks up and down the room.)

WIL. (*outside*). Allie ! Allie ! Fasten me up, will you ? (*Enters R.*) I'm a sight for sore eyes ! (*She wears a dress with a train. The dress is a trifle too long in front. She holds it up with one hand and together in the back with the other. She stops suddenly when she sees ALICE.*) Why, what's the matter, dear ?

ALICE. Oh, Billy, the worst has happened ! Mrs. Folinsbee isn't coming !

WIL. Well, does that queer the festive tea-drinking ? Who is she ? A song and dance speciality, or chief tea-maker of the "smart set" ?

ALICE. I forgot that you didn't know about Mrs. Folinsbee. She is a writer.

WIL. Another ? (*Vainly tries to fasten her dress in the back.*) It's positively dreadful the number of people who try to write ! There ought to be a law for the suppression of intellectual freaks.

(*Gives up trying to fasten her dress. Drops into a chair and regards ALICE with a resigned air.*)

ALICE. She is a friend of Richard's, or rather her husband is. She's passing through the city on her way to some dreadful convention. It seems that it is next to an impossibility to get her to attend a social affair. Richard thought it would be a distinction for me to have her and introduce her to the "set," so he invited her. I invited the "set" to meet Mrs. Folinsbee, and no Mrs. Folinsbee for them to meet. Nice state of affairs.

WIL. Oh, give them plenty of tea and lettuce sandwiches, and they won't mind.

ALICE. Oh, won't they ? A lot you know about it ! They will mind, but in a way you little dream of. My dear friends will just gloat over me because she isn't here. Especially that hateful Frances Kidder. I heard that she was crazy over Richard last season, and now she has it in for me.

WIL. I hate to disturb your mental anguish, but it is getting late. Would you mind hooking me up ? I'm not sure that this gown is going to be a fit.

ALICE. Forgive me, Billy. I'm utterly selfish.

(*Fastens her dress.*)

WIL. You're a perfect dear. If I could see Mrs. Folinsbee, I would express my opinion in no uncertain terms.

ALICE. Oh, she isn't to blame. She had to disappoint some one else, too. Billy, you look perfectly great ! I never looked half as well in that dress.

WIL. (*looking in glass*). Goodness ! I do look rather classy, that's a fact. I wouldn't know myself.

ALICE. I'll get you a hat.

[*Exit, r.*

WIL. (*posing in front of mirror; takes her dress up in front; dances across stage toward c. exit; sings*). "Remember, Mr. Johnson, I'se a lady !" (JESSIE enters c. *Regards her in astonishment*.) You look as if I was "your father's spirit." Didn't you ever see a lady before ?

JESSIE (*walking toward r. exit*). Not like you, miss. I've been working for Mrs. Craig-Winter. [*Exit.*

WIL. Holy smoke ! (*Grabs a sofa pillow.*) I'll disturb your equilibrium for once ! (*Throws pillow and hits ALICE as she enters with a hat and a lorgnette.*) Alice, my dear girl, I'm so sorry !

ALICE. What are you doing, Billy?

WIL. That was intended for your maid as a gentle reminder of Mrs. Craig-Winter.

ALICE. I shouldn't say she needed any reminder. Try this. (*Places hat on WIL.'s head.*) Perfect ! Oh, Billy, you're a dream. I wish I was as pretty as you.

WIL. As me ? You dear innocent, you beat me all out and out. (*ALICE hands her the lorgnette.*) Ah, pahdon me, what name did I understand ? Sterling ? Charmed, I'm sure, my deah. (*Shakes hands in the air. Trails across the room.*)

ALICE. Billy, how you act !

WIL. (*sitting down with a sweep of her train, regarding her sister through the lorgnette with mild surprise*). Act ? I'm afraid I don't understand.

ALICE. Your hostess needn't be afraid that you will be taken for a reporter. You could pass for any one under the sun.

WIL. (*languidly*). Th-anks, my deah !

ALICE (*suddenly*). Oh, Billy, I have the most brilliant idea. Pose for my guests as some celebrity !

WIL. (*dropping her dignity*). Why, Alice, have you lost your senses ?

ALICE. Oh, Billy, please ! You could do it just as easy. Why, you could be Mrs. Folinsbee ! My guests never saw you ! They never saw her !

WIL. For goodness' sake, Alice ! I never heard anything so absurd ! Some of them would be sure to meet Mrs. Folinsbee sooner or later. Then what would you say when they began to ask you awkward questions ?

ALICE. Tell them you were a different Mrs. Folinsbee.

WIL. I guess that wouldn't be any fairy tale.

ALICE. Then, you will do it ?

WIL. Why, Alice, of course I can't do it. I'd be glad to help you, but it is a wild scheme. Anyway, I must start for Mrs. Ferncroft's this minute. (*Rises quickly.*)

ALICE. Ferncroft ? (*Thinks for a minute.*) My goodness, Billy, wasn't it Mrs. Folinsbee that you were to meet at Mrs. Ferncroft's ?

WIL. (*regarding her blankly for a second, then suddenly remembering*). It sure was !

ALICE. Well, she isn't going to be there. When she telephoned she said she was due at Mrs. Ferncroft's after she had been here, and she would have to disappoint her, too. I thought Ferncroft sounded familiar, but I couldn't remember where I had heard it.

WIL. (*explosively*). Jiminy crickets ! Have I lost my first assignment ?

ALICE. Looks like it. It's a shame, dear.

WIL. (*thinking deeply*). Alice, the editor said the other day that he wanted reporters who, when they couldn't get news, could make it. You can introduce me to your guests as Mrs. Folinsbee. This afternoon I am going to "make" news.

ALICE (*alarmed*). Billy, you must be careful ! You mustn't do anything reckless.

WIL. Oh, who's afraid now ? Alice, this is my first chance, and I'm going to prove to that editor that I'm a good thing if the sky falls. (*Bell rings.*)

ALICE. Oh, dear, they are beginning to come ! Oh, Billy, why did I ever propose such a crazy thing ? I—I—really wasn't in earnest. I'm scared perfectly speechless !

WIL. Say, Alice, what have I ever written ?

ALICE (*dazed*). Why, nothing yet, have you ?

WIL. Oh, Alice, come out of it ! What has Mrs. Folinsbee written ?

ALICE (*helplessly*). Oh—er—why—I don't know, really. Books, I suppose. That's what people usually write, isn't it ?

WIL. Hush !

(JESSIE comes to door c. FRANCES KIDDER enters.)

ALICE (*pulling herself together with an effort*). Miss Kidder, I'm very glad to see you.

FRAN. And I to see you, my deah Mrs. Sterling.

ALICE. Miss Kidder, let me present Mrs. Folinsbee.

(Chokes over the name. JESSIE gazes in astonishment.)

FRAN. I'm so charmed, Mrs. Folinsbee.

WIL. (*dropping her handkerchief as she rises to greet FRAN.*). Delight-ed, I'm sure.

FRAN. (*turning to ALICE*). It was so delightful of you, Mrs. Sterling, to give your friends a chance to meet Mrs. Folinsbee.

(As she moves across the stage toward a chair, JESSIE darts forward and picks up handkerchief.)

JESSIE. Your handkerchief, Mrs. Folinsbee.

(Bell rings. JESSIE exits c.)

ALICE (*in a quick aside to WIL.*). Good heavens ! We reckoned without Jessie !

FRAN. Do you know, Mrs. Folinsbee, I imagined that you were years older. Gray hair and glasses—rather eccentric, you know. You don't look a bit intellectual.

WIL. Really ?

FRAN. But I fully realize how wonderful you are. I would give a good deal to understand Bernard Shaw as you do. How can you tell whether he is serious or satirical ?

WIL. Oh, it is quite simple. He writes such sweet little things.

FRAN. Sweet ?

WIL. Yes. Don't you think so ? (JESSIE comes to door c. FRAN. turns toward the door. WIL. to ALICE in a swift aside.) For the love of Mike, talk ! I never read one of Shaw's plays in my life !

Enter JACINTH CARLYSLE, C.

ALICE (*greeting JAC.*). Miss Carlyslle, I'm so glad you could come this afternoon.

JAC. So am I, Mrs. Sterling. (Greets FRAN.) Ah, Frances !

ALICE (*introducing WIL.*). Mrs. Folinsbee.

JAC. Mrs. Folinsbee, I'm so pleased to meet you. Of course you get tired of hearing the praises of your work forever sounded, but I must tell you how much I admire your views of Bernard Shaw.

WIL. Very kind of you to say so, I'm sure.

JAC. (*as she sits down*). Well, Frances, I haven't seen you since your delightful luncheon.

ALICE. And it was delightful. I haven't enjoyed anything more since I came here.

FRAN. Very charming of you, Mrs. Sterling. I'm glad it was delightful. It ought to be something nice to console me for the unfortunate outcome of the affair.

JAC. Unfortunate outcome?

ALICE. Why, what do you mean, Miss Kidder?

FRAN. You haven't heard?

ALICE }
JAC. } (*together*). No!

FRAN. Perhaps you noticed the little individual bonbon holders?

JAC. Why, we couldn't very well help noticing them, could we?

ALICE. They are the dearest things I ever saw. I was perfectly crazy over mine.

FRAN. Well, some one must have shared your opinion. Nine of them were stolen that very afternoon.

ALICE }
JAC. } (*together*). Stolen?

FRAN. I don't wonder that you are horrified. It's the most extraordinary thing. Nothing else in the dining-room was touched. And why were nine stolen? While he or she (*with a look as of being able to tell volumes*) was about it I should think it would have been just as easy to have taken the whole dozen. (*JAC. is decidedly uneasy and ALICE sits as if turned to stone.*) Pardon me, Mrs. Folinsbee, this must be anything but entertaining for you.

WIL. (*giving ALICE a queer look*). I assure you I am very much interested. Did I understand you to say bonbon holders?

FRAN. Yes. Solid gold, set with tiny stones. Imported, you know. A birthday gift from my father and I never had anything I prized more.

JAC. Are—are you making efforts to recover them?

FRAN. I should say I am. I have a private detective em-

ployed. Of course at first I suspected a servant, but I was never more mistaken. One of the holders has already been traced, and you wouldn't believe me if I should tell you where it is.

(JESSIE comes to door c. MRS. STEVENS and MRS. CRAIG-WINTER enter.)

MRS. S. (*talking very rapidly, hardly breathing between sentences*). How do you do, Mrs. Sterling? I have taken the liberty of bringing Mrs. Winter with me. (ALICE makes several efforts to greet MRS. W. Gives up in despair and waits for MRS. S. to finish.) I know you will forgive me when I tell you that both Mr. and Mrs. Winter are especial friends of your husband. Mrs. Winter has been in the south several months and has just returned to us, and I simply couldn't resist the temptation of bringing her here this afternoon. After you have become well acquainted with Mrs. Winter you will understand what it has meant to us to have her away for months, and what it means to have her back again.

ALICE. I am very glad to welcome you, Mrs. Winter, not only for your sake and my husband's, but I am very sure for my own.

MRS. W. That is exceedingly kind, Mrs. Sterling. I can assure you that I hated to intrude.

MRS. S. I can testify to that. Certainly I begged and pleaded and almost went down on my knees before she would listen —

ALICE (*desperately; interrupting another flow of conversation*). Mrs. Stevens, I want you to meet Mrs. Folinsbee.

(As MRS. S. goes to WIL., JAC. and FRAN. greet MRS. W. with delight. ALICE joins them and they talk together.)

MRS. S. Mrs. Folinsbee, I can't tell you how pleased I am to meet you. When I heard that you were to be here, I broke three engagements, for I wanted the whole afternoon to talk to a woman who has such erroneous ideas of Bernard Shaw. I thought it was my duty to come here and tell you that you are entirely mistaken in your opinion. When I read your latest, my blood fairly congealed in my veins. I told Mr. Stevens that without a question Mrs. Folinsbee was on her way to the insane asylum.

WIL. Perhaps that *is* where she has gone.

MRS. S. (*regarding her in amazement*). I beg your pardon?
ALICE (*coming to WIL.'s rescue*). Mrs. Folinsbee, let me present Mrs. Winter.

(MRS. S. *looks annoyed but joins JAC. and FRAN. and begins a long discourse without giving them a chance to speak.*)

MRS. W. Mrs. Folinsbee, I actually intruded here this afternoon for the sake of meeting you. I would go a long ways to shake hands with a woman whose ideas of Bernard Shaw coincide so perfectly with my own.

WIL. Charming of you, I'm sure. So delightful to think that we agree. Did I understand that your name is Winter?

MRS. W. Yes.

WIL. Is it by any chance Mrs. Craig-Winter?

MRS. W. It surely is. Why do you ask?

WIL. Why—er—I heard some one speaking of you not long ago.

MRS. W. (*delighted*). Really, Mrs. Folinsbee? Who was it?

WIL. Now let me see if I can recall. I have such a poor memory for such things. Well, never mind. No doubt it will come to me before you depart.

Enter JESSIE, R. She has a card in her hand.

JESSIE. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Folinsbee. (*She hesitates.* MRS. W. *withdraws.*) You had a message from a newspaper. I wrote it down because I told them you was occupied and couldn't come to the 'phone.

WIL. (*taking the card*). Very clever of you, Jessie. I didn't know you could be so wise.

JESSIE. Well, miss, I hope I worked long enough for Mrs. —

WIL. (*interrupting*). Jessie, who was that lady I was talking with when you came in?

JESSIE. My stars, I don't know!

WIL. You never saw her before?

JESSIE. No, miss, I never did!

WIL. Eureka! (*Laughs in JESSIE's face.*) Jessie, it is too bad to shock your nervous system this way. You never saw such "carryings on" before, did you?

JESSIE. No, miss, I never did! I can assure you Mrs. Craig-Winter never had anything like it in her house.

WIL. Didn't she? You must feel the change in your position keenly. (WIL. turns away. JESSIE exits, haughtily. WIL. reads card.) "Mrs. Folinsbee is not at Mrs. Ferncroft's. Ring up the office as soon as convenient." Mr. Editor, your news is somewhat stale.

JAC. (suddenly breaking away from MRS. S., and walking to a table). Mrs. Sterling, are these flowers from Richard's conservatory?

ALICE. Yes. I think the conservatory is one of the most charming features of this house. You know flowers are Richard's hobby. Wouldn't you like to go and see them?

ALL. Oh, may we? Delightful! Charming!

ALICE. Come this way.

(All exeunt c., talking as they go. Bell rings. JESSIE enters R.; exits c.; returns. MARY STODDARD and MADGE HASTINGS enter. MADGE slips off her coat and hands it to JESSIE as she enters.)

MADGE. You said Mrs. Sterling and her guests were in the conservatory?

JESSIE. Yes'm. I'll speak to her.

[Exit, c.]

MARY. Isn't that just like Mrs. Sterling?

MADGE. Yes. I love to come here. You feel so free to go all over the house if you choose.

MARY. Do you know, Mrs. Sterling drops a remark once in a while that makes me think she has not always been accustomed to a home like this.

MADGE. It doesn't make any difference what she has been accustomed to, she is a dear!

MARY. She is all of that. Have some violets?

(Offers her a tiny gold bonbon holder.)

MADGE (accepting a violet and placing it in her mouth). Thanks. Frances' souvenir?

MARY. Yes; aren't they dreams?

MADGE. They certainly are. Frances outdid herself for once, but I wouldn't for worlds give her the satisfaction of knowing that I use mine.

MARY. I don't use mine when she is looking. Let's go to the conservatory instead of waiting here.

MADGE. All right. Mrs. Sterling will not care.

MARY. Not in the least.

(*They exeunt c.* ALICE enters R. JESSIE enters C.)

JESSIE. I was looking for you, miss—ma'am, I mean. Some more ladies came. They must have gone to the conservatory, I guess. I told them you was there.

ALICE. Very well. Oh, Jessie, I—I suppose you are rather surprised at what you have seen this afternoon? My sister appearing as Mrs. Folinsbee?

JESSIE. Well, I never saw anything like it at Mrs. Craig-Winter's.

ALICE. Probably not. Well, we have our reasons for what we are doing. Of course you understand that I don't wish it talked of. (*Glances cautiously toward the door.*) Jessie, you know those little bonbon holders that you admire so much?

JESSIE. The gold ones on the buffet?

ALICE. Yes. You can have them if you like.

JESSIE. All three?

ALICE. Yes. Get them now! Take them to your room. I don't want my guests admiring them if I am not going to use them myself.

JESSIE (*very much surprised*). T-thank you, Mrs. Sterling. You're very kind.

ALICE (*dryly*). Don't mention it.

(JESSIE exits R. WIL. enters C.)

WIL. Alice!

ALICE. Oh, Billy, how you startled me. I'm so nervous!

WIL. I should think you might be. Alice, will you explain how three of Miss Kidder's bonbon holders happen to be on the buffet in your dining-room?

ALICE. Why, I put them there, of course, when I returned from her luncheon.

WIL. I'm afraid that I don't quite understand.

ALICE (*impatiently*). Why, I thought they were souvenirs.

WIL. Souvenirs?

ALICE. Yes. It sounds ridiculous, I know, but I couldn't have been the only one to make the mistake, as nine were taken. Every luncheon I have been to we were given a souvenir of some kind. These holders were where the souvenirs are usually placed. To be sure, no one said anything about them, but Frances is so unpopular that her guests wouldn't say a word if she presented each one with a touring car; besides, I saw—some one take one, and—and I just made a mistake.

WIL. Then why don't you tell her so?

ALICE (*dramatically*). Tell her? Tell Frances Kidder that I thought her "solid gold, imported, highly prized gift from her father" was souvenirs? Oh, no! She would spread the story far and wide that I stole mine, got scared off, and returned it with a trumped up excuse. Frances will never see her holders again. Not one in the party will dare to rectify her mistake. Why, Frances would give the story to the newspaper and then claim that it leaked out through a servant.

WIL. Why, Alice, I think you are prejudiced. She doesn't look that kind of a girl.

ALICE. No, she doesn't, I'll admit, but she is the worst I ever met. She is like a treacherous kitten—soft and pretty with claws that will scratch your eyes out. (*Walks to the door, c.*) Miss Carlyle is coming. I want to talk with her. Do go and keep the others from coming back here. For pity's sake remember that you are a star attraction and do your best for me!

WIL. All right. I'll do what I can but I wish to goodness that I knew what I have written. (*Walks to the door. Turns back.*) By the way, don't you think it would be a good idea to have the *souvenirs* removed from the buffet before Miss Kidder enters the dining-room?

ALICE. Oh, don't worry! I have looked out for that.

[*Exit WIL., r.*

Enter JAC., c.

JAC. Oh, Alice! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Sterling.

ALICE. Please don't, Jacinth. I'm so pleased to have you call me Alice. I feel so much better acquainted with you than any of the other girls.

JAC. Good. I hoped you felt that way. Alice, Frances' story of her bonbon holders has upset me somewhat. Did you notice the expression on her face when she said that one of them had been traced?

ALICE. Jacinth, I may as well tell you the truth. I know that you have one. I saw you take it. Of course you thought it was a souvenir.

JAC. I'm so relieved that you understand. Have you any idea where any of the others are?

ALICE. Well, I *had* three! I gave them all away!

JAC. Three?

ALICE. Yes. The young lady next to me didn't take hers.

I thought she didn't care for it. I *did!* Some one dropped one on the stairs, therefore I had three, which I feel quite sure is two more than any other lady in the party can boast of.

JAC. What in the world are we going to do? Alice, I don't like to prejudice you against any one in our set, but do you understand how impossible it is to try to explain to Frances? Especially for you to explain? Alice, Frances Kidder used to like your husband exceedingly well, and she is just waiting her chance to do something disagreeable. There, it's out, and I feel better.

ALICE. I have heard a good deal and what I haven't heard I can guess at.

JAC. Every girl who was at that hateful luncheon must be warned at once.

ALICE (*uneasily*). I mustn't stay away from my guests so long. Let us return to them now and we can have another talk later.

(*They exeunt c. JESSIE enters r., with the three holders in her hands. The bell rings. She places the holders on the table. Exits c. Returns with MRS. FOLINSBEE.*)

JESSIE. Mrs. Sterling and the ladies are in the conservatory. MRS. F. Will you speak to Mrs. Sterling? Kindly tell her that Mrs. Folinsbee has arrived.

JESSIE (*startled*). Excuse me, ma'am. The name again, please.

MRS. F. (*very distinctly*). Folinsbee.

JESSIE. I will — Oh, here is Mrs. Sterling.

Enter ALICE, c.

MRS. F. I have arrived at last, Mrs. Sterling.

ALICE (*looking at her uncertainly*). I'm very glad to see you, I'm sure.

WIL. (*entering r. hurriedly*). Oh, Alice! Oh, pardon me.

ALICE (*to MRS. F.*). Let me present Mrs. Folinsbee.

(MRS. F. *gazes at WIL. in astonishment.*)

WIL. Delight-ed!

MRS. F. Thank you. May I inquire if you are the Mrs. Folinsbee who has such extraordinary views of Bernard Shaw?

WIL. (*resignedly*). I certainly have that distinction.

MRS. F. (*with a peculiar smile*). Well, you can't imagine how pleased I am to meet you.

(*They talk together.*)

ALICE (*who has been watching them anxiously, detains JESSIE*). Jessie, do you know who this lady is?

JESSIE. I can't say that I do, miss—ma'am.

ALICE. It's exceedingly awkward. I can't recall who she is. She seemed to know me, but I can't remember that I have ever even seen her before.

JESSIE. It's too bad I can't help you. I never was called upon for that kind of service. Mrs. Craig-Winter always knew who she was entertaining. [Exit, R.

MRS. F. Mrs. Sterling, it is indeed a treat for me to have the privilege of meeting Mrs. Folinsbee. I am intensely interested in Bernard Shaw, and I have been longing to talk with some one who thoroughly understands him. (*Turns to WIL.*) Do tell me, Mrs. Folinsbee, in which play do you think he reached the highest point of his art?

WIL. Well, really, I shouldn't dare to say.

(*Gives ALICE a desperate look.*)

ALICE. Er—my other guests are in the conservatory. Couldn't we discuss Mr. Shaw out there?

MRS. F. With pleasure.

(*They exeunt c. Slight pause. MARY, MADGE and JAC. enter c.*)

MADGE. What in the world ails you, Jacy? I didn't want to come back in here.

MARY. You look as if you had discovered something new in a Marcel wave. What has happened?

JAC. Listen, girls. Frances' souvenirs were not souvenirs.

MADGE. What's the joke?

MARY (*taking out her holder and looking at it*). Yes, explain. I'm afraid the point is a trifle obscure.

JAC. You won't think it is any joke. (*Sees the holder in MARY'S hand.*) For pity's sake, put that out of sight! You'll be arrested if you aren't careful. Those holders were a birthday gift to Frances from her father. She says that she thinks nine of them were stolen the afternoon of the luncheon. Any-

way, she has a private detective working and has traced one of her precious holders.

MADGE. How do you know?

JAC. She told us when she first came in.

MARY. Well, if that isn't like Frances Kidder! (*Looks at her holder in disgust.*) We might have known these weren't souvenirs. Frances is too mean to present her guests with Lincoln pennies!

MADGE. We must get rid of those things as soon as we can.

JAC. I should say we must. (*ALICE enters c.*) Alice has got rid of hers already.

MARY. You're in luck, Mrs. Sterling.

ALICE. Yes, I am fortunate. Do any of you know who that lady is—the distinguished looking one? The last one who arrived?

MARY. I don't.

(MADGE shakes her head.)

JAC. I never saw her before.

ALICE. I never felt so ridiculous in my life. I've met so many ladies since I came here that I simply can't keep them all in mind. Usually I remember the face if not the name, but in this case I can't remember the face. It's strange that no one knows her.

MARY. Don't you think she acts odd? I only saw her for a second but it seemed to me that she regarded every one with suspicion.

MADGE. She looked to me as if she was dying to laugh.

JAC. She sticks to Mrs. Folinsbee like a burr.

ALICE. Yes, driving her crazy with questions about Bernard Shaw.

MARY. My goodness, I know who she is!

ALL. Who?

MARY. Frances' private detective!

ALL (*murmuring*). Oh, really, impossible!

ALICE. You don't actually think so?

MARY. I actually do!

JAC. It would be just like Frances to get her here this afternoon.

ALICE (*indignantly*). If I thought she was a detective!

JAC. (*hastily*). Well, of course you don't really know!

MADGE. Don't say anything yet, but watch!

MARY. Get her in here!

ALICE. All right. We will have some tea right away. I'll just go and see if everything is ready. [Exit, R.

MARY. Well, if this isn't a disgusting state of affairs!

MADGE (*discovers the bonbon holders on the table*). Girls, look!

JAC. { (together). } Where?
MARY { } What?

(*They go to the table.*)

MARY. Mercy!

JAC. Where did they come from?

MADGE. Listen! Some one is coming. (*Runs to door c.; tragically.*) It's Frances and Mrs. Stevens!

(MARY grabs the holders, puts them in a chair and sits on them. Looks up at JAC. and says as FRAN. and MRS. S. enter c.)

MARY. No, I don't agree with you at all. The best play that Maude Adams ever appeared in was "Peter Pan."

FRAN. For pity's sake, change the subject! Mrs. Folinsbee and that last lady who arrived have talked Bernard Shaw until my head swims.

MRS. S. You mean the woman has talked. Who is she? Does any one know? Well, whoever she is, she is exceedingly ill-bred. Poor Mrs. Folinsbee hasn't been able to get a word in edge-wise. I can't abide a woman who is always expressing her opinions and monopolizing the conversation. Now to my mind, a conversation which is a success should be one in which every one has a share. Don't you agree with me?

ALL (*emphatically*). We do!

MRS. S. I knew you would. Where is Mrs. Sterling? You know, I haven't had six words with her this afternoon, although as far as that goes I never have many words with her. She isn't much of a talker. She just seems to stand and listen to me. Strange for a hostess to be absent so much. (*To MADGE.*) Where did you say she was?

MADGE. I didn't say, but she is making the tea, I think.

MRS. S. Tea? Merciful heaven, don't mention tea! Were any of you at Mrs. Malone's yesterday? No, you weren't, I know. Well, she had some new kind of tea-cakes. Round, dark brown and very hard, with the most outlandish name. As near as I could make out it was "Crumbtickle-puffs."

FRAN. Were they good ?

MRS. S. Good ? They were the most heathenish things ! Nothing on this earth, above or below it, ever tasted like them ! Well, I ate eleven and —

JAC. Eleven ?

MARY. Of the crumbtickle-things ?

MRS. S. Yes. I simply had to. I read a paper at the club and by the time I reached Mrs. Malone's I was famished. Well, of course I had company to dinner last night, or rather Mr. Stevens had company, so I had to eat. I don't know why it is that your husband's friends are always so uninteresting. I thought they would never go and that I should certainly die before they did go. Well, after they finally departed I took five tablets. All different. You would naturally think that out of five kinds, one at least would give me some relief. Well, it didn't, and after I went to bed I had the most extraordinary sensation. I felt exactly as if my stomach was on the pillow and my head down in the bed somewhere.

(Enter MRS. W., MRS. F. and WIL., c.)

MRS. W. Mrs. Folinsbee is actually beaten at her own game. She has learned something about Bernard Shaw that she never knew before.

WIL. (*devoutly*). I certainly have !

JESSIE (*coming to door r.*). Mrs. Sterling would like to have you ladies come out this way. [Exit.

MRS. S. (*making a dive for WIL. and taking her by the arm*). My dear Mrs. Folinsbee, at last I can have you to myself for a little while.

(*They exeunt. JAC. and MRS. W. start to follow.*)

MRS. W. (*to MARY*). Aren't you coming, Mary ?

MARY. No, I don't care for tea this afternoon.

MADGE. Nor I. (*Motions to JAC. to go.*)

MRS. W. (*looking surprised*). How odd !

JAC. (*pulling MRS. W. along*). Never mind. Mary is odd sometimes. [They exeunt.

MARY (*rising*). Well, I have sat on things that were more comfortable.

MADGE. What are you going to do ?

MARY. Hide them until we can tell Mrs. Sterling that they are here. (*She puts them under the cushion of the chair.*) Now let's go out for some tea.

MADGE. Why, you said —

MARY. My dear Madge, did you never hear that women are privileged to change their minds?

MADGE. Well, I'm glad you have changed yours, for I am starved.

(MADGE exits R. MARY starts to follow. Turns back as JESSIE enters C.)

MARY. Jessie, ever since that day I stepped on my gown and you mended it for me so nicely, I have intended to show you my appreciation. So to-day I brought you this little trifle.

(Takes out her bonbon holder and gives it to her.)

JESSIE (taking it and gazing at it in astonishment). Thank you. That was very kind of you, Miss Stoddard.

MARY. Not at all.

JESSIE (still regarding the holder). Well, I never! (Goes to table, discovers that the others are not there.) Why, where?

(Begins to look for them. MADGE enters R. Looks about cautiously. Doesn't observe JESSIE. Exits C. JESSIE sees the peculiar appearance of the chair cushion. Kneels by the chair. Lifts the cushion. Finds the holders. MADGE enters C., with the telephone in her hand. Does not see JESSIE.)

MADGE. Roxton 639-r. Yes-r. (Pause.) Hello! Is that you, Bob? What luck! You must do something for me at once. Yes, this is Madge. Go up to my room. In the right hand side of the middle drawer of my dresser you will find a gold bonbon holder. Yes, I said bonbon holder! Be sure that you wrap it up so that no one can see it. Cross the ferry and when you get out where it is good and deep, drop the holder overboard. Yes, I'm perfectly sane. You just bet it isn't any joke! I don't care what you are doing, you must attend to this at once. Your sister's honor and reputation are at stake! (Hangs up receiver. JESSIE rises. MADGE regards her with horror.) Jessie! (Goes up to her.) Jessie (handing her a dollar bill from her coin purse), you didn't hear what I said. Understand?

JESSIE (taking the bill). Certainly, ma'am. (MADGE exits R. JESSIE walks back to the chair. Regards the three

holders in the chair, the one in her hand and the dollar bill.) Well, I have worked in worse places than this !

(Bell rings. JESSIE hesitates a second ; puts the fourth holder in the chair with the others, places the bill on them and covers them over with the cushion ; exits c. MARY pulls ALICE in R.)

MARY (*going up to the chair*). Yes, right here. Three of them ! (*She looks toward door as ALICE lifts the cushion.*)

ALICE. Three ? There's four and a dollar bill !

MARY (*in astonishment*). M-M-M-Mercy ! Quick, some one is coming ! Let's go back !

(*Pulls ALICE out R. JAC. enters c., followed in a second by JESSIE.*)

JAC. (*looking about*). I thought Mrs. Sterling came in here. Jessie, you have always been very courteous when I have been here and several times done me small services. I'm going to send you a little gift to-night.

JESSIE (*delighted*). Thank you, Miss Carlyle. What is it ?

JAC. A little gold bonbon holder. [*Exit, R.*]

JESSIE (*looking after her*). Well, if that ain't the limit !

(*Goes to chair. Takes her holders and the bill and exits c.*

JAC. and ALICE enter R.)

JAC. Yes, dear, I must go. I promised Mrs. Ferncroft.

ALICE. I'm sorry to have you leave so early. If you hear any more about the souvenirs, let me know.

JAC. Yes, I will. Good-bye, dear.

ALICE. Good-bye.

(JAC. exits c. MARY and MADGE enter R.)

MARY (*looking toward the chair*). Have you ?

ALICE. No. I will right now. (*Lifts the cushion.*)

MADGE. Why, they are gone !

MARY. My land ! First there were three, then four and a dollar, and now there aren't any at all !

MADGE. It's that detective !

ALICE (*thinking*). I don't believe so.

MARY. I'm sure of it ! Really, Mrs. Sterling, I must go ! My nerves are completely upset.

MADGE. I think I'll be going, too. I'll come some other time when there isn't a detective in the party.

Enter FRAN. and WIL., r. JESSIE enters c.

FRAN. Are you going?

MADGE. Yes.

FRAN. I will go along with you. Mrs. Sterling, if you should hear anything about my gold bonbon holders, I beg of you to let me know. Good-bye. [Exit, c.

(MADGE, MARY and ALICE give JESSIE a frightened look.
She tosses her head.)

MARY (*nervously*). Good-bye, Mrs. Sterling. We've had such a perfectly lovely time. (*Rushes out c.*)

MADGE. Yes, delightful! So glad to have met Mrs. Follinsbee. (*Hurries after MARY.*)

ALICE (*to JESSIE*). After you have shown the ladies out I wish to speak to you. (*JESSIE exits c. After slight pause returns.*) Jessie, you carried four holders and a dollar bill to your room?

JESSIE. Yes, I did! They were all given to me. There's something mighty queer about this business. I shouldn't think you'd expect a girl who's been working for Mrs. Craig-Winter —

WIL. Jessie, I have something to say to you. I would advise you to listen carefully. You have been taking advantage of my sister ever since you came here, because you thought she was young and inexperienced. You have lied to her and deceived her from the first day. You never worked for Mrs. Winter in your life. You never even saw her until this afternoon. That young woman out there (*pointing to r. exit*) in the blue gown is Mrs. Craig-Winter. How long do you suppose you would hold your position here if Mr. Sterling knew about this, and what do you think would happen to you if Mrs. Winter knew how you had been using her name? Now, listen! There are two subjects never to be mentioned by you as long as you remain in the employ of my sister. One of them is—bonbon holders, and the other is—Mrs. Craig-Winter. Do you understand?

JESSIE (*with a gasp*). Yes, Miss Gordon.

WIL. You may go. [Exit JESSIE.

ALICE. Oh, Billy, you are a jewel! You have saved my

life. (*Enter* MRS. F., MRS. S., and MRS. W., *r.*) You are not going?

MRS. S. Yes, we must. (*To* MRS. F., *in an aside as ALICE speaks to MRS. W.*) And I do hope our next hostess will stay with us at least five minutes at a time. (*To ALICE.*) You see, dear, you have given us so much attention, and we have had such a charming time, we will go so that you can give all of your attention to the next arrivals. Dear Mrs. Folinsbee, I hope to meet you again. Good-bye, Mrs. Sterling. [*Exit, c.*

MRS. W. (*to* MRS. F.). Are you going on with us?

MRS. F. Not yet. I want to have a little talk with Mrs. Sterling.

MRS. W. Mrs. Sterling, I thank you for your hospitality to a stranger.

MRS. S. I am very glad you came, and I shall expect to see you often.

MRS. W. Thank you. Good-bye.

ALICE (*coldly, to* MRS. F.). Madam, I understand why you are in my home. You may as well go. You will accomplish nothing here.

MRS. F. Your words are extraordinary, to say the least. I intend to accomplish one thing before I depart. Who is this young woman who is posing in my place?

ALICE. In your place?

MRS. F. Yes. I am Mrs. Folinsbee.

ALICE } (together). What?
WIL. }

ALICE. Merciful heaven, I thought you were an impostor!

WIL. Mrs. Folinsbee, this is all my fault. I am Mrs. Sterling's sister. I have been trying for weeks to get an assignment from a newspaper. I got my first one to-day. It was to interview you at Mrs. Ferncroft's. You are a writer. You must have begun down the ladder somewhere. You can guess how I felt when I found that you weren't to be at Mrs. Ferncroft's. In a moment of madness I conceived the idea of impersonating you and making some snappy news for a grouch of an editor.

ALICE. There aren't words in which we can apologize for what we have done.

MRS. F. Dear child, no apology is necessary. I guess I know a joke when I see one. I haven't had so much fun for weeks. If this little girl (*putting her arms around WIL.*) will let me put her in a story, I'll forgive everything.

WIL. (*giving Mrs. F. a rapturous squeeze*). If you will tell me your opinion of Bernard Shaw.

MRS. F. It's a bargain.

WIL. Oh, let me call that editor.

[*Exit, c.*

MRS. F. My dear, I think I will not go on to Mrs. Ferncroft's. I'll stay here. I want to see Richard and congratulate him upon his wife and his sister-in-law.

ALICE. Oh, Mrs. Folinsbee, I don't know what to say to you !

(WIL. enters with telephone.)

WIL. Roxton—679 ! Yes. (*Pause.*) Hello ! I want to talk with Mr. Macy. (*Pause.*) Hello ! This is Miss Gordon. I'll be down before six and hand in my copy. Of course, I know Mrs. Folinsbee wasn't at Mrs. Ferncroft's. Do you suppose I would stop there ? I went where she was, and I can give you the whole history of her life, past, present and future. What ? Do you mean it ? Am I pleased ? Well, rather ! Good-bye ! (*Jumps up and down.*) I've got a position ! On the paper ! He says I'm too good to lose ! Alice, do you expect any more guests this afternoon ?

ALICE. Oh, yes. It is early yet. (*Bell rings.*) There's some one now.

WIL. (*removing her hat*). Well, you will please introduce me as your insignificant little sister, and this lady as Mrs. Folinsbee. Bernard Shaw is one too many for me.

MRS. F. (*laughing*). You shouldn't back down that way. You are getting valuable experience, and some day, you know, you are going to be a famous newspaper woman.

WIL. I hope your words may prove true, but one thing is sure. I'll never forget my first assignment.

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CHARACTERS

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MADAME ELIZABETH KENT-COKE, *Prosecuting Attorney.*

MADAME TOMASIA ERSKINE, *Attorney for Defendant.*

"DOTTY" DEVELIN, *the Defendant.*

CLERK OF THE COURT.

SHERIFF.

Witnesses for the Commonwealth

MISS MEHITABLE SIMPKINS, *a spinster of uncertain age.*

MISS NANCY ANN SIMS, *another spinster of doubtful age.*

PROF. ELVIRA JONES-JOHNSON,
Instructor of Advanced Theology.

Witnesses for Defendant

DR. ELEANOR AINSWORTH, *expert Oculist and Alienist.*

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PROF. DOLLY DIMPLE, *Professor of the Art of Courtship.*

FOREWOMAN OF THE JURY and eleven jurors.

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ULRICA, *his daughter.*
CECIL, *his son.*
VINING, *his servant.*

CAPT. THE HON. CLIVE TREVOR.

The Jacobson Family

SIR ISAAC JACOBSON, *M. P.*
REBECCA, *his wife.*
ESTHER, *his daughter.*
ADRIAN, *his son.*
MAXIMILIAN, *his servant.*

WALTER LEWIS, *musical agent.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

SCENE.—Morning room in Sir John Cotswold's house in the Cotswold Park Estate, Kensington, London.

ACT II

SCENE.—Drawing-room in Sir Isaac Jacobson's house. Next Door. The same afternoon.

ACT III

SCENE.—Same as Act I. Three days later.

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